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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDANIANS CONDEMN ISRAELI RAID ON JERICHO PRISON

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) The GOJ, local press and post contacts denounced Israel's March 14 military raid on the Palestinian prison in Jericho. Government spokesman Nasser Judeh issued a statement to media that said the Israeli action "represents an unjustifiably serious escalation ... that will only enhance tension in the region and harm ongoing efforts to reinvigorate the peace process." Judeh continued that the GOJ planned to contact Quartet governments and the Palestinian Authority to urge them to "revitalize" the agreement under which PFLP Secretary General Ahmed Saadat and other prisoners were kept under the supervision of U.S. and British monitors. Contacted by the Ambassador on March 14, Foreign Minister Khateeb, who undertook to encourage Palestinians officials to call for calm, nonetheless predicted that this episode would play into the hands of Palestinian hardliners.

¶2. (SBU) All major newspapers in Amman on March 15 led with highly critical reports on the Israeli military action in Jericho. The headline of independent, centrist daily Al-Ghad read "Israeli piracy in Jericho," while that of leading, semi-official daily Al-Rai announced "Israeli occupation storms Jericho prison and kidnaps Saadat and his comrades." Press stories also highlighted claims of direct U.S. and British collusion in the Israeli raid. The humiliating televised spectacle of Arabs forced to shed their uniforms and surrender has made the response here even more emotional than it might otherwise have been, and was noted by several columnists. Commenting on the Jericho attack, a popular Jordanian cartoonist drew an Israeli tank slaying Palestinians, while international observers and media on board the tank watch a film projection about Israeli peace efforts. A common theme as well is an assumption that the Israeli operation was designed, with U.S. collusion, to bolster Olmert's electoral prospects.

¶3. (C) Contacts reached by post were unanimous in condemning the raid on the Jericho prison. Yanal Bustamy, a prominent businessman of Palestinian descent and vice-chairman of the Amman Chamber of Commerce, said that he feared the raid would prompt a renewed cycle of violent actions and lead to even greater chaos and suffering in the West Bank and Gaza. Bassam Qaqish - an East Banker, retired general and former government minister - told poloff that the military operation showed that Israel "has no intention to work towards peace or improve the situation." He continued that the Palestinian prisoners taken by Israel "must be brought back under Palestinian control." Qaqish added, however, that the U.S. should not be blamed for the raid since it had warned the PA well in advance that it might withdraw its monitors.

¶4. (C) Speaking at a March 14 dinner attended by polcouns, Jordan's Grand Mufti Sa'ed Hijjawi slammed the Jericho operation and called for Arabs of all faiths to support the Palestinians, drawing repeated applause from a crowd of about

100 Jordanian Christians and Muslims. Hijjawi went on to denounce alleged recent Israeli desecrations of the Church of the Ascension in Nazareth and other Christian holy sites, and accused Israel of working toward a long-range goal of eliminating any Palestinian presence in Palestine. GOJ spokesman Judeh, who also attended the dinner, told Ambassador March 15 that Hijjawi's sentiments were typical of Jordanians' reaction to the Jericho prison raid, except that Hijjawi had not blamed the U.S. and Britain, while most Jordanians did. "People are very angry," said Judeh. Former Prime Minister Kabariti expressed to Ambassador astonishment that we did not develop an alternative plan upon the withdrawal of the monitors, to prevent a predictable crisis over the status of the prisoners.

15. (C) Comment: There is considerable misinformation about this event in the media and on the salon circuit; U.S. statements largely have been drowned out. End Comment.
HALE